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ABSTRACT

Although no major longitudinal studies of library user education programs have been conducted at the community college level, several surveys have been conducted at the senior college level that can be combined with data about community colleges and their students to draw some conclusions in this area. First, there is a real need for bibliographic instruction at the community college level. Such instruction is consistent with professional guidelines and with the goals of community college education and with the characteristics and goals of community college students. Bibliographic instruction can take the form of separate courses dealing specifically with the library and methods of access or it can be integrated into the existing curriculum through specially designed units that can be presented at appropriate points during the semester to augment existing courses. Student enrollment patterns, the faculty status of librarians at community colleges, frequently small enrollments, and other factors make the integrated approach to library instruction especially well suited to the two-year college. However, although community college librarians may have a somewhat easier time of instigating programs of integrated instruction than their colleagues at senior institutions, they are likely to meet resistance, and must be prepared to promote such programs as well as to develop the skills necessary to conduct them successfully. (Author/AYC)

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JC 790 257

Some years ago Abraham Kaplan, in his memorable portrait of "the nature and role of a library . . . from the outside" observed that:

> Everything in the library must ultimately be related to its uses, and these uses in turn must ultimately be dependent upon the users.[1]

It is an essential deduction, but inside the bustling world of libraries such simple truths sometimes lose their way. Yet libraries and librarians are inexorably bound to their users. They are, in fact, defined by them, and no area of professional concern confronts that simple premise more immediately than bibliographic instruction, for it is predicated upon the belief that if America's libraries are to improve, the skills of library users must, likewise, be enhanced.

Current interest in the subject has thus far provided an excellent opportunity for librarians to acknowledge their debt to users, and for that, alone, it has proven worthwhile, but hard research on the subject has not always kept pace with enthusiasm. Such is certainly the case when attention is turned to America's community college libraries.

To date, no major longitudinal study of a user education program has been conducted at the community college level. This is not, of course, to say that such programs do not exist. They do, and many prosper. Nor does the absence of such a study indicate that no information exists which is applicable to a user education program at the community college level, for it does. Several surveys and

analyses of instructional programs have been conducted at the senior college and university levels, and much can be culled from those documents which can be applied to the community college setting. In addition, a good bit is known about community colleges and the students they serve, and it would seem that a few conclusions can be based upon that data as well.

First, it is evident that there is a real need for bibliographic instruction at the community college level. Already, over one third of all undergraduates are attending the 1200 community colleges across the nation,[2] and projections indicate that 43 per cent of all undergraduates will be enrolled in two-year institutions by 1985.[3] Secondly, such instruction is not only consistent with professional guidelines, it is consistent with the goals of community college education and with the characteristics and goals of students attending them. Thirdly, it would appear that such instruction can be successfully integrated into the existing curriculum. Finally, it would seem, based upon the little that is known, that although community college librarians may have a somewhat easier time of instigating programs of integrated instruction than their colleagues in senior colleges, they will meet resistance. If these programs are to succeed, that resistance will have to be overcome.

Of course the need for bibliographic instruction has been acknowledged time and time again. In 1932 the Carnegie standards suggested instruction in library use, and more recently the American Library Association's Reference and Adult Services Division in 1976 and Association of College and Research Libraries in 1977 have underscored

the importance of such training.[4]

Bibliographic instruction is not only consistent with these and similar professional pronouncements, it is consistent with the broad goals of community college education. The goals of such institutions are variable, but in general they may be stated as follows:

(a) to provide equal educational opportunity for all,

(b) to provide a comprehensive program of career education,

(c) to provide services which assist students to explore their career interests, attitudes and potential for personal growth,

(d) to contribute to lifelong learning opportunities.[5]

If education at the two-year level is to provide an opportunity for all to train or re-train, if it is to provide potential for personal growth and to contribute to lifelong learning, what single service could be more appropriate at this level than a program of library user education?

Such programs are clearly consistent with the professional objectives of community college librarians and with the goals of the institutions they serve, but if these programs are to succeed, decisions must first be made regarding the form that instruction should take and the means of implementing the chosen form.

In as far as the form is concerned, two possibilities currently exist: (a) that instruction may be isolated, that is, a separate course(s) dealing specifically with the library and methods of access to it may be established, or (b) that instruction may be integrated into the existing curriculum, that is, specially prepared units designed to

augment already existing courses may be prepared and presented at appropriate points during the semester to students in their required and elective courses.

In defense of the isolated form, one must concede that it does offer the student an introduction to the library; it offers training in research methodology; and it may offer basic point of use information for various reference works and bibliographic services. These same points of favor, of course, apply to integrated instruction, as well.

But the isolated form offers more than its share of problems. One major drawback of such an approach is that traditionally, isolated library instruction courses are offered only on an elective basis. Though it is not inconceivable that such courses could, one day, be required of all undergraduates, it is presently quite improbable. It is a given, then, that the isolated course, if it is to survive, must do so as an elective, but recent studies do not offer much hope of such survival. At the University of California, Berkeley, for example, an elective bibliographic instruction course was offered, but because of a lack of financial and administrative support it could only accomodate "150 students a quarter, hardly a significant fraction of the Berkeley undergraduate population."[6] Attempts to initiate experimental isolated mini-courses at Boston University also failed to attract a significant portion of the undergraduate population. In a study of that program, Lenski reported that only 198 students out of the 17,000 member campus were persuaded to enroll in isolated

bibliographic instruction courses on that campus.[7]

It may be impossible to determine with precision just why attempts to promote isolated instruction have consistently failed to attract large numbers of undergraduates, but a cursory review of the literature does offer a few clues.

Melum, in a survey of fifty college instruction programs, concludes that among the disadvantages of the isolated credit course are these:

(a) insufficient staff release time is granted for such courses,

(b) there is a tendency to include irrelevant library science details in such courses, and

(c) there is a tendency to disregard students' interests in such courses.[8]

In another investigation of such courses, Stoffle and Bonn agree that too often such isolated instruction over-emphasizes library science at the expense of the student's needs. As a result, students find the work repetitive and dull.[9]

To this catalog of disadvantages, community colleges can add two major problems with isolated instruction which are unique to such institutions: (a) many programs on a community college campus are characterized by an absence of elective hours, and (b) given the nature of community college students, it is doubtful that an isolated course would provide them with an atmosphere conducive to learning even if they were able to select for an elective in bibliographic instruction.

Unlike typical college and university students, many community

college students are enrolled in certificated programs and in two-year technical programs. These curricula simply do not have a sufficient number of elective hours to permit enrollment in courses such as bibliographic instruction. In the case of certificated programs such as printing technology, child care and data processing, it is not uncommon to find that students are granted absolutely no elective hours. Two-year terminal programs such as nursing, fire science, mortuary science and recreation therapy are also quite restrictive and may generally be said to offer the student between three and nine credit hours of electives. With electives at a premium, it would be difficult, indeed, to lure such students into an isolated course of library instruction. And even if such students could be enticed to enroll in an elective course of user instruction, it is doubtful, given the characteristics of such students, that the course would be entirely successful.

In some respects community college students are no different than their counterparts in colleges and universities. They both learn best, as Hills has observed in his analysis of learning theory and bibliographic instruction, when motivated and involved. Both are also more likely to master the material if they deem it relevant.[10] But community college students, it should be remembered, are in general less academically oriented than undergraduates at the college and university level. Their achievement levels tend to be lower than their counterparts,[11] and, in general, they display a more intense need for guidance, relevance and immediate reward.[12]

These student characteristics, in conjunction with the problems of isolated instruction which have been discussed above, speak strongly for programs of instruction at the community college level which incorporate what Hills has called "active methods of instruction which involve the student and which are both integrated with the academic course and carefully structured so that the student progresses with full understanding."[13]

It may be supposed, then, from the evidence at hand, that post-secondary bibliographic instruction can be judged sound educational practice and that such instruction can be best offered in a course-related or integrated fashion. Those within the profession remain obligated to careful scrutiny of existing programs of instruction, for systematic evaluation will produce refined methodology and may ultimately alter the nature of those programs (just as advances in learning theory may well alter teaching methods associated with bibliographic instruction). But the immediate future beckons, and community college libraries and learning resource centers are in an excellent position to initiate and expand user education programs.

In many respects, the problems of integrated bibliographic instruction which have been experienced at the college and university level do not appear so overwhelming at the community college level. Community college campuses are generally smaller than college and university campuses, and, as a result, librarians at the community college level tend naturally to be more visible. The tendency toward smaller enrollments provides another advantage for the community

college librarian intent on integrating instruction: smaller institutions incorporate fewer levels of authority (administrators, curriculum committees, etc.). There are, then, fewer instructors and administrators to convince of the importance of integrated bibliographic instruction.

Not only is there likely to be less quantitative resistance to change (though the quality may be maddeningly high), change will generally be more easily affected at this level because librarians are more likely to have faculty status.[14] That status promotes an atmosphere of mutual respect which is of extreme importance. Just as importantly, that status has resulted in librarians traditionally serving on significant faculty committees and their presence there provides a means of affecting change that non-faculty librarians do not always have.

Finally, to the advantages of size, visibility and status may be added a fourth: the absence of graduate programs and the accompanying loss of emphasis on undergraduate instruction. As Knapp has noted, "the power structure and goal orientation characteristic of the type of university in which the undergraduate library is likely to occur produce an environment which is hostile to emphasis on undergraduate instruction. . . ."[15] In the absence of that power structure, the integration of instruction at the Freshman and Sophomore levels should prove more easily attainable.

But notwithstanding the relatively strong position that community college librarians enjoy on their own campuses, it would be

foolhardy to conclude that the integration of bibliographic instruction at the two-year level, however justifiable, will meet no resistance. Change, for whatever reason, can usually be expected to meet resistance, and that resistance can be expected to manifest itself both inside and outside of the library. And so, though it is true that the size of the average community college and the status normally afforded librarians on those campuses do tend to simplify problems associated with the implementation of integrated instructional programs, they cannot, of themselves, guarantee immediate acceptance of such programs. Nor can the highly touted qualities of enthusiasm and dedication so often attributed to librarians in community college libraries and learning resource centers be expected to automatically produce acceptance of such programs.[16]

Acceptance can come, however, if those qualities of enthusiasm and dedication to service are brought to bear on faculty members and administrators working outside of the library and if public services personnel inside the library demonstrate a willingness to teach.

The teaching faculty's importance to a program of integrated user instruction in a community college setting cannot be over-emphasized. While more and better evaluations of instructional programs are certainly needed (particularly at the two-year level), it should be remembered that a number of significant programs at the college and university levels have failed, and no single factor has been more destructive than the lack of faculty acceptance for "most political and academic power in an institution rests with the faculty . . ."[17]

It is an axiom of academic life and cannot be disputed. Nor can it be disputed that, regardless of the type of post-secondary institution, ". . . the attitude of the instructor towards the library is of primary importance, probably of greater importance than any other factor."[18]

These observations pertain equally to the community college, college and university. Of particular interest to library personnel in the community college is the fact that faculty attitudes are shaped in the absence of a research imperative.[19] This is to say that community college instructors are routinely asked to carry course loads which are considerably heavier than their colleagues in colleges and universities, and, therefore, they are not routinely required to publish nor are they required to direct high-level student research. The absence of this research imperative leaves community college librarians in the position of advocating what Knapp has called a method oriented (as opposed to content oriented) instructional approach for which there is no immediate payoff for faculty in terms of publication or promotion.[20]

Given the typical teaching loads in American community colleges, it is doubtful that faculties in those institutions will, in the foreseeable future, feel the pressure to research and publish that their colleagues in colleges and universities have long felt. Nonetheless, community college libraries and faculties may represent to many students a very important last chance at bibliographic instruction. Formal education for many students at this level will end upon completion of

the associate degree, and, as Kirk has suggested, public libraries have thus far shown little inclination toward establishing user education programs, though this situation may be changing.[21]

As community colleges do offer many of their students a final opportunity to receive training in library use, it is particularly sad to note that at present, far too few students are provided with that chance, and the reason is a simple one: it is not expected of them. Like their peers in colleges and universities, they are too often able to produce acceptable work without their libraries. This is a distressing conclusion when one considers that over thirty-five years ago Branscomb, in a significant study of college libraries, reached the same verdict.[22]

A discussion of just how community college librarians may be able to overcome the textbook or content oriented syndrome displayed by so many faculty members on their campuses follows, but before proceeding to an examination of internal changes which can foster integrated user instruction, one other important external factor should be mentioned--the administration.

Just as positive faculty attitudes regarding the integration of bibliographic instruction are essential, so, too, are those of administrators, for they are in a position to allocate funding for essential staff members and collection development, and without a commitment of funds for personnel and the collection, any attempt to foster user instruction is doomed.

As Miller has concluded in his analysis of user instruction

programs in selected American colleges, ". . . it appears that any kind of library use instruction requires either more library personnel and/or time specifically allocated for instruction. Obviously the extent of library instruction is determined by the number of librarians available to give instruction."[23] One might argue that integrated instruction is particularly personnel intensive as it requires not only preparation and presentation time (as would isolated instruction) but also a continued allocation of public relations time.

As instructors and the curriculum change, efforts must continually be made to persuade new faculty and established faculty teaching new courses that the benefits of bibliographic instruction justify its inclusion in their courses. Librarians charged with the responsibility for implementation of an integrated program will, therefore, be investing considerable time preparing lectures and assignments, consulting with other faculty as to the needs of their students and presenting material to students in the classroom. If the number of instructors requesting these services grows, public services staffs will also be responsible for coordinating their efforts so that instruction is sequential and redundancy held to a minimum.

These functions are time consuming, and unless the quality of reference assistance on the floor is to suffer, additional personnel will often be needed. Additional librarians will mean additional cash outlays and that committment will only come if administrators can be convinced of the value of bibliographic instruction (often a time consuming task in itself).

In many cases, it may also be necessary to persuade administrators that a well-developed program of user instruction requires additional outlays for materials. Subtle classroom discussions regarding the fluid nature of the expanding outer limits of bibliographic structure will mean little to a student or faculty member if two recent volumes of the Readers' Guide have "disappeared" and have not been replaced. As Stevenson has observed, "the library building and the systems employed within it must be got right, i.e. understandable and usable by the user not just by the librarian, before librarians will begin to communicate effectively, and before libraries become welcoming places."[24]

To recap, if an adequate program of integrated bibliographic instruction is to become a reality, two extremely important forces outside the library must first be convinced of the worth of such a program--the teaching faculty and the administration. Without their support, librarians will lack the opportunity and the means necessary for the implementation of such a program.

It is doubtful, however, that their support will surface of its own volition. Though many studies and surveys attest to the importance of external support, none, so far as can be determined, point to an instance in which the faculty and administration initiated a comprehensive program of sequential user instruction at the community college, college or university levels. If change is to come, it will come from the campus librarians, and it will take the form of promotion and a demonstrable ability to do the job.

As Anspaugh has stated in her discussion of library instruction

on junior college campuses, "one aspect that cannot be stressed enough is the tremendous personal relations work that the librarians must do."[25] By 'librarians' it may be assumed that she refers to both library-learning resource directors and chairpersons and to rank and file librarians in public and technical services, for the job of public relations is of such importance to a successful instructional program that it cannot be left to only one member of the library's professional team.

The task of positive public relations, as mentioned earlier, is not as formidable in the community college as it might be in a larger college or university, but it does require a concerted effort by all professionals on the staff.

Experience has shown that among the many avenues available for selling the instructional program, none may be deemed more successful with instructors than a simple demonstration of the library staff's ability to teach. If one instructor can be persuaded to invite a librarian to his class and if that session proves fruitful for his students, the odds are great that the librarian will be invited again and that other instructors will be informally advised of the success of the instructional session. Word of mouth advertising is a potent tool. If the quality of student research is actually improved following a classroom presentation, it will be reflected in improved class debates, panel discussions, and research projects. Those improvements will not be overlooked by concerned colleagues and the word will most assuredly get around.

On the other hand, uninspired classroom presentations and confused lectures also make an impression on students and instructors. The quality of assignments submitted will not improve, and the word, once again, will travel. The high visibility of most community college librarians will certainly cease to be an asset, for all the public relations in the world will not substitute for a quality product.

Excellent instruction is difficult to describe. It has long defied exact measurement by concerned administrators and faculty, and given the tremendous number of variables in a classroom situation, it may continue to do so. But whatever the formula, it surely includes an instructor who knows the material and who presents it well. One need not have read of the Monteith experiment to know that academic librarians are better qualified to teach library skills than their non-librarian peers. They are certainly in a better position to know the collection and the ever-changing means of access to it. But it is also obvious that many librarians do not feel that they have been trained to present that information and to successfully interact with groups of students.

It is small wonder that many community college librarians feel unprepared for instructional duties. Like their fellow professionals, they have not been trained to do so by their library schools. In the face of one professional pronouncement after another, library schools have failed to acknowledge that, ". . . if we are to be taken seriously as teachers, then we just ourselves take seriously the process of teaching."[26]

Our unwillingness to take teaching seriously has a regrettably long history as Kirk has noted in his brief history of instructional attempts. He asserts that research demonstrating the need for bibliographic instruction can be traced to the 1930's and 1940's.[27] That research led to "a major surge of activity in library instruction."[28] which culminated in "a decline in activity . . . almost immediately."[29]

In reviewing probable causes for this failure, Kirk cites four factors which can be succinctly summarized as inadequate instruction and isolated instruction.[30]

If we are to build on past experience, library schools will need to lead the way. To date, however, they have not seemed so inclined. In fact, as recently as 1976 a survey of library schools indicated that ". . . only four library schools offer courses specifically on library instruction . . . thirty schools offer no course or even part of a course concerning library instruction."[31]

In the absence of course work within the professional curriculum, community college librarians in need of such training may well have to turn to education departments for assistance until some means can be devised to prod library school faculties to take the history of their own discipline seriously.

This is not, however, to suggest that the primary responsibility for the integration of instruction in American community colleges should be placed at the door of the graduate library science faculty, for no single group can or should be expected to single-handedly affect all of the various changes necessary for effective, integrated instruction.

One should recall, too, that the concern which has been expressed in regard to user education programs is in no way an indictment of these groups, but rather an indication of their prior successes.

It was not too many years ago, we should remind ourselves, that the user's most significant problem was not his inability to utilize the various means of access to the collection, but rather the very unavailability of such means of access.

When Carlyle, for example, was engaged in locating important documents in the British Museum's collection for his great history of the French Revolution, it was not his inability to use the collection which drove the distinguished scholar to rail bitterly against the British Museum, but rather the fact that the Museum "wanted a proper catalogue."

Today, the majority of community college libraries and Learning Resource Centers are blessed with catalogs which, if not entirely proper, are at least available and usable, and the time has come for librarians and their fellow educators to turn their efforts toward the task of instructing their patrons in the use of those research tools.

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